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SPATIAL PATTERNS AND URBAN GOVERNANCE IN KUWAIT

EXPLORING THE LINKS
BETWEEN THE PHYSICAL,
THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC
AND THE POLITICAL

Nuno F. da Cruz, Dhari S. Alrasheed,
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Spatial Patterns and Urban Governance in Kuwait: Exploring the Links Between the Physical, the Socio-Economic and the Political

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Abstract

As a city-state, Kuwait represents an instructive case-study to investigate barriers to sustainable urban development. Among the many challenges faced by the country, the spatial configuration of the metropolis – and the various adverse effects that stem from it – is a key area of concern. In this study, we focus on spatial segregation and measure it at the metropolitan and governorate levels to determine just how serious the problem really is. The results confirm the existence of a highly divided society. Without being able to make causality claims (given the limitations in the data), our evidence points to potential drivers of different nature. A key working hypothesis of our investigation was that urban governance arrangements in Kuwait may be an important part of the story behind these spatial patterns. The empirical findings of our analysis of the governance network of spatial planning in Kuwait strongly support this notion and allow us to draw some policy recommendations to break urban Kuwait's 'vicious cycle', where popular aspirations around unsustainable practices send strong signals to the institutions tasked with formulating policy which, once implemented, recreate societal expectations.

Introduction

Despite the wealth of evidence and practical guidance on policies, investments, land use patterns and features of the built environment that support more sustainable models of development, most countries and cities around the world continue to struggle with their implementation.¹ This is particularly salient in the case of Kuwait, where local conditions and past decisions have led to a city characterised by low-density urban sprawl, heavy reliance on private cars and limited use of public space.² Compounding all these undesirable and unsustainable outcomes, and further intensifying them, is the unequitable spatial distribution of different segments of the population across the metropolitan area.

But how serious is the problem of spatial segregation in urban Kuwait? And what may be its cause(s)? Our research tackles these two questions by (1) quantifying spatial segregation in Kuwait, (2) investigating the underlying mechanisms influencing these patterns by comparing segregation measures with other spatial variables, and (3) exploring to what extent governance may help explain the path being taken by the city.

To measure segregation, we employ several indices using recent data at the district and block levels. The scarcity of spatially granular longitudinal data hinders the establishment of robust causal links between observed variables. Nevertheless, our results point to strong associations that should give pause to decision-makers. With regards to governance, we briefly review the key rules and institutions as well as the policies shaping urban development in Kuwait. Our empirical analysis, however, focuses on the various actors with stakes in the strategic spatial development of the city, as well as on the patterns of formal and informal relationships that exist between them. The rationale for this focus stems from the fact that past research has already tackled some of the key institutional and policy-related factors impacting the ‘cityness’ of Kuwait.³ Because the ‘soft power’ arising from the social structures of governance is much more difficult to grasp, this key dimension of urban governance is often overlooked.

Kuwait has the longest running elections for a Municipal Council and the oldest directly elected National Assembly in the Arabian Peninsula. Therefore, it is considered as one of the earliest states in the Gulf region to go through an institutionalisation process. From the commission of the first masterplan in 1952 to the enactment of the Constitution in 1962, the country has gone through many iterations of the process of state building. As a de facto city-state, Kuwait represents a unique case to explore the governance of spatial development. Our analysis, however, can be instructive to other cities and countries in the region and beyond.

¹ ‘The Localisation of the Global Agendas: How Local Action is Transforming Territories and Communities’, UCLG (2019). Available at: https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/goldv_en.pdf (accessed 19 March 2024).

² Farah Al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed: A History of Oil and Urban Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016); Asseel Al-Ragam, ‘Negotiating the Politics of Exclusion: Georges Candilis, Housing and the Kuwaiti Welfare State’, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 41/2 (2017), pp. 235–50; Philipp Rode et al., ‘Resource Urbanisms: Asia’s Divergent City Models of Kuwait, Abu Dhabi, Singapore and Hong Kong’, *LSE Cities* (2017). Available at: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/86457/1/Resource%20Urbanisms%20Asias%20divergent%20city%20models_2017.pdf (accessed 19 March 2024).

³ Sharifa Alshalfan, Dhari S. Alrasheed and Barrak Albabtain, ‘Housing Kuwaitis: An Overview of the Current Model and Its Implications on Affordability and Quality of Life’, *KFAS* (2022). Available at: <https://www.kfas.org/Publications/Housing-Kuwaitis> (accessed 19 March 2024); Al-Ragam, ‘Negotiating the Politics of Exclusion’; Saskia Sassen, ‘Cityness: Roaming Thoughts about Making and Experiencing Cityness’, *Ex Aequo* 22 (2010), pp. 13–18.

Background

Government and Administration

Kuwait's government structure is regulated by the Constitution. Individual ministers may head multiple ministries and oversee multiple governmental agencies, which have increased in number in recent years. The Emir of Kuwait oversees the three branches of government. The executive branch is headed by the Prime Minister and consists of all ministries and their related agencies, authorities and state-owned companies.⁴

Kuwait Municipality has its own executive-legislative structure, with the Municipality itself acting as the executive body through an appointed Director and the Municipal Council as the legislative body.⁵ The Council consists of 10 elected members plus six appointed by the Council of Ministers.⁶ Together, they are responsible for masterplanning as well as regulating land-use and other 'urban' matters. Recently approved by the Council of Ministers, the Fourth Kuwait Masterplan (4KMP) sets the spatial development strategy until 2040, but the details of its final version have yet to be made publicly available.

Political gridlocks are not uncommon in Kuwait, but tensions between the Kuwait National Assembly (KNA) and the government have been increasing,⁷ resulting in nine cabinet resignations, two changes of prime minister, four parliamentary elections, and two emirs' successions between 2020 and 2024.⁸ Hence, despite the public optimism around a 'new era' for Kuwait, the political situation remains contentious.⁹ This gridlock also coincides with the highest number of top-level vacancies in the civil service in recent years.¹⁰ The scale of this administrative shake-up, whose objectives and results remain to be seen, is unprecedented, with serious implications on the day-to-day function of the government.

⁴ The legislative branch represented by the KNA consists of 50 elected members from five electoral districts plus the 16 appointed ministers as ex officio members. The judicial branch is headed by the Constitutional Court.

⁵ Alshalfan, Alrasheed and Albabtain, 'Housing Kuwaitis'.

⁶ Municipality Law 33/2016.

⁷ 'The Politics of Permanent Deadlock in Kuwait', *The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington* (2021). Available at: <https://agsiw.org/the-politics-of-permanent-deadlock-in-kuwait/> (accessed 19 March 2024).

⁸ 'Cabinet Formations', *Raqib50* (2024). Available at: <https://www.raqib50.com/parliaments/14/cabinets> (accessed 14 April 2024).

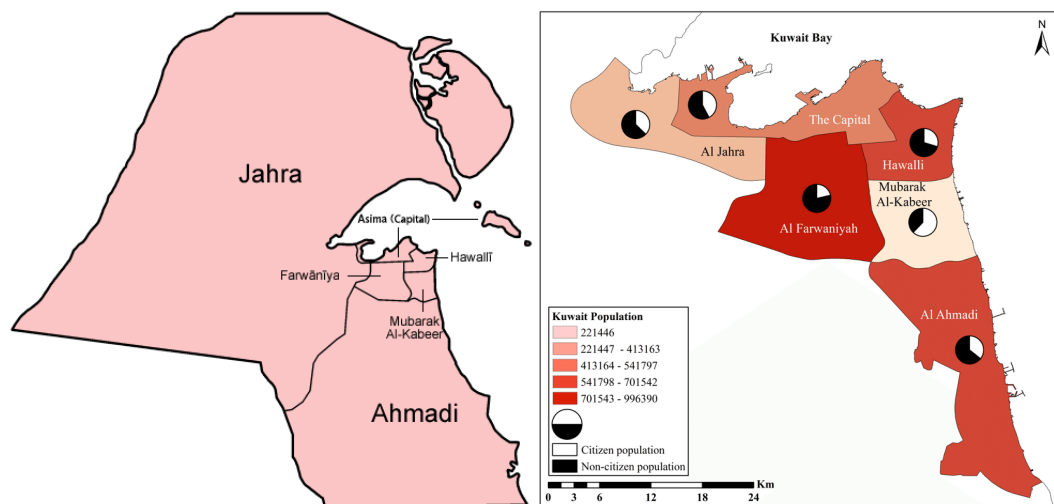
⁹ Kuwait had two recent successions upon the passing of the late Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad in September 2020 and in the aftermath of Emir Sheikh Nawaf al-Ahmad's passing in December 2023. The Crown Prince at the time, Sheikh Mishal al-Ahmad, automatically became the new Emir and has one year to name his Crown Prince heir to the National Assembly. See: 'Kuwait's Emir Sheikh Nawaf dies at 86, Sheikh Meshaal named successor', *Al-Jazeera*, 16 December 2023. The new leadership came into power during the COVID-19 pandemic, a volatile oil market and an unstable local political climate. The Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal, at the time, declared a 'new era' in a speech delivered before the last 2022 elections, which included a first-of-its-kind criticism of the executive branch, emphasised the importance of government reform and transparency, and explicitly promised to not interfere in the parliamentary elections. See: 'Kuwait's New Doctrine', *The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington* (2022).

¹⁰ Following a wave of resignations by senior officials to take advantage of a time-limited generous retirement pension package. See: '69 Senior Officials Resign in Past Five Months', *Arab Times* (2023).

Two persistent policy issues factor into the political and administrative instability. The first is the state housing program for Kuwaitis, with the backlog of applications reaching over 90,000 at the time of writing.¹¹ Housing and urban development were among the main priorities in the four-year governmental programme the cabinet submitted to the parliament that was dissolved in 2022.¹² These came after numerous laws and policies have been implemented in the past three decades attempting to address the housing issue, some with unintended consequences that resulted in severely restricted housing supply by the private sector and prohibitively high prices.¹³ The government continues to struggle administratively and financially to deliver new housing projects and keep up with demand. The second issue is the demographic imbalance in the population, whereby non-Kuwaitis form a 70 percent majority. The government programme addresses it by proposing a new residency law and establishing a ‘smart admission system’ for foreign labourers.¹⁴

Kuwait is divided administratively into six governorates, each headed by a governor appointed by the Council of Ministers. Formally, governors are tasked with overseeing the delivery of public policies in their territories (see Figure 1).¹⁵ These are further divided into districts, each headed by a mayor appointed by the Minister of Interior and tasked with similar responsibilities at the district level. Mayors also used to be responsible for certain administrative tasks such as reporting births, deaths, and crime. However, over time, the central government has taken over most of the regional and local responsibilities, leaving governors and mayors to mostly ceremonial roles.¹⁶

Figure 1: Kuwait Governorates



Left: country, right: urban area. Source: left: Wikipedia and right: Aldousari and Alsahli, 2017.¹⁷

¹¹ Plus additional 40,000 applicants who were allocated land plots but are still in the process of building their homes or awaiting financing or infrastructure. See: ‘January 2023 Report’, *Public Authority for Housing Welfare* (2023). Available at: <https://www.pahw.gov.kw/Downloads/Schedules/PAHW-january-2023-report-updated.pdf> (accessed 19 March 2024).

¹² It listed the following policy objectives: (1) establishing a land regulation authority; (2) private sector participation in state housing projects to fulfil the accumulated housing applications; (3) providing sustainable real estate financing.

¹³ Alshalfan, Alrasheed and Albabtain, ‘Housing Kuwaitis’.

¹⁴ ‘Key Areas’, *Kuwait Government Programme* (2022).

¹⁵ ‘For Governorates Systems’ / ‘*qānūn bsh’an nzām l-mhāfzāt*’, Law 21, *State of Kuwait* (1992).

¹⁶ Alshalfan, Alrasheed and Albabtain, ‘Housing Kuwaitis’.

A final layer to territorial administration is occupied by non-government, local entities: co-operative societies and *diwaniyas*. Co-ops started informally in the 1940s and now they are present in every district. They are governed by a board elected through a process where only Kuwaiti residents of the district can run and vote in. Co-ops manage the food supply through a network of supermarkets.¹⁷ However, they have expanded their commercial and social activities to include building ‘mini malls’ and organising social events, thus creating a sense of local identity and competition across districts.¹⁸ Their role has extended beyond their formal scope by, for example, managing public spaces and providing basic public services (this was more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, as co-ops coordinated with government agencies on food and service delivery to their residents). *Diwaniyas* are a physical space within the house where men gather to socialise and discuss current political and social issues.¹⁹ Over time, these spaces cultivated social capital and influence within their districts.²⁰

Key Urban Policies

Pre-oil Kuwait was a typical Arab harbour city, displaying an intricate urban form where a network of narrow streets facilitated a system of clustered residential houses based on close-knit kinship and economic ties. With the advent of oil in the late 1940s, the city was drastically transformed. Using the country’s newfound wealth to raise Kuwaiti’s standards of living and tackle the need to absorb the influx of foreign labour, the government hired British urban planners Minoprio, Spencely, and P.W. Macfarlane to draft the country’s first masterplan in 1952. It proposed an extensive reconfiguration of the city, with a new concentric and radial roads network emanating from the old city. The plan’s vision was to transform the city centre into a commercial district. As a result, the neighbourhoods in the old city were demolished, and its Kuwaiti residents were relocated to newly developed residential districts outside of it.

With the redevelopment of the old city, formerly compact residential and mixed-use areas became larger, spread-out residential districts outside of the city centre. Through the Land Acquisition Policy, new lots were made available and allocated to Kuwaiti citizens. The policy was a way to ensure that Kuwaitis were compensated for their lost land and recognised as important stakeholders by the state.²¹ It also ensured that non-Kuwaitis were left out of these neighbourhoods, therefore contributing to a spatial divide between national and non-national populations.²² The residential areas within the country were

¹⁷ ‘Union of Consumer Cooperative Societies’, *History of Co-Operative Societies*. Available at: <https://kuccs.com.kw/Portal/History.asp> (accessed 23 February 2023).

¹⁸ Alshalfan, Alrasheed and Albabtain, ‘Housing Kuwaitis’.

¹⁹ Weaam Alabdullah, ‘Incorporating Practices of Publicness in Kuwaiti Parks. Chai Ithahha, Cricket, Diwaniya, and Malls’, *The Journal of Public Space* 5 (2020).

²⁰ A recent example can be found in the Adaliya district, where residents mobilised and held a press conference at a local *diwaniya* to protest against the construction of a commercial mall and a hotel by the local sports club. They adopted the slogan ‘Adaliya is an ‘ideal’ residential district, not a commercial district’. See: ‘People of Adaliya Refuse the Commercial Complex in Their Area’, *Alqabas* (2021).

²¹ Abdulrasool A. Al-Moosa, ‘Kuwait: Changing Environment in a Geographical Perspective’, *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies* 11/1 (1984), pp. 45–57.

²² Benyameen Ghareeb, *Housing Crisis In Kuwait: Toward A Viable Alternative* (Yale School of Architecture, 2015), p. 7.

therefore divided into two major types: one primarily for Kuwaiti citizens, characterised by low-density, single-family houses, and wide-open streets; and another for housing the non-Kuwaiti population, characterised by high densities, apartment blocks, and poorly cared for streets.²³

In 1962, the Council for Planning was established among other government bodies as part of the nascent modern state of Kuwait.²⁴ Subsequently, the second masterplan (2KMP) was developed in 1970 by Colin Buchanan and Partners to expand on previous transformations and develop Kuwait as a larger metropolis with new urban centres along the Gulf coast. The third masterplan (3KMP) was developed by WS Atkins in 1997, six years after Kuwait was liberated from Iraqi occupation, with emphasis on post-war reconstruction. This plan adopted sub-regional planning strategies, including creating new satellite towns to house a population of 3.5 million. The 4KMP, developed by Perkins and Will, was initiated in 2016 and is still under review by the Municipal Council.²⁵ It focuses on merging the country's socioeconomic vision with a physical plan at national, regional, and metropolitan levels, where the main vision is transforming Kuwait into a commercial and financial hub.

While each masterplan dealt with vastly different challenges at different phases of the country's development, they all followed the same basic ethos, focusing on zoning land for different uses and segregating Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis into separate residential areas.²⁶ The use of zoning to control the functions of development in specific areas has been significant to the way urban Kuwait looks like today. However, the new masterplanning process is attempting to set different policies that will allow for more flexible zoning regulations.²⁷

Much of the planning efforts have been based around imported Western ideals of what makes a 'good home.' And though the resulting political perceptions and popular expectations around Kuwaiti homes only emerged in the 1950s, they are now entrenched.²⁸ The need to expand the housing stock for non-Kuwaitis has been overlooked, creating overcrowded areas and a city-wide problem of congestion and absence of street life affecting all resi-

²³ Al-Moosa, 'Kuwait: Changing Environment in a Geographical Perspective', p. 48.

²⁴ This was the first planning body responsible for the development of the country, which was led by the Council of Ministers and a few other members from the private sector at that time. Its key mandate was to establish a socio-economic development plan to realise the new vision for the country. Eventually, it became the Ministry of Planning in 1979. For more information see: Case Study 1 in Yasmeen Al Jalal, 'Oil and Opportunity: An Overview of Kuwait's Development Planning History', *Shuwaikh Economic Office* (2021). Available at: <https://www.economicoffice.com/> (accessed 20 March 2024).

²⁵ Merlin Fulcher, 'Perkins+Will Scoops Kuwait Masterplanner Role', *The Architects' Journal* (2021). Available at: <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/perkinswill-scoops-kuwait-masterplanner-role> (accessed 20 March 2024).

²⁶ Nevertheless, some of these plans and their subsequent reviews raised the issue of over-crowding in non-Kuwaiti areas, stressing the need for increasing housing supply for non-citizens and low-income groups.

²⁷ Led by Kuwait Municipality and the SCPD to align the physical development of the country with the state's economic and social goals, the 4KMP is challenging the way zoning has been deployed by proposing a new code that defines urban densities rather than imposing functions. The intention is allowing for more flexible development of mixed-use communities (Section 2.3.2 New Kuwait Zoning Code in Housing in Alshalfan, Alrasheed and Albabtain, 'Housing Kuwaitis', pp. 50–1.

²⁸ Abdurassool A. Al-Moosa and Maki M. Aziz, *Al-Khasa'is Al-Ijtima'iya Wal-Iqtisadiya Li Al-Muhajireen Ila Al-Kuwait* (Beirut: Dar Alqalam, 1981), p. 137.

dents.²⁹ Most non-Kuwaitis are housed in small apartment-type units or multi-functional vertical housing typologies. The ‘expat areas’, therefore, are at odds with the indulgent type of planning that shaped the Kuwaiti residential neighbourhoods.³⁰ Real-estate legislation prevents non-Kuwaitis from owning property in Kuwait.³¹ And, in addition to being disenfranchised, they are excluded from participating in any state housing schemes and thus are forced to rent out properties from private (Kuwaiti) landlords or real-estate companies/developers. This legal restriction magnified the housing imbalance between Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis as, while the number of non-nationals was increasing disproportionately, the land allocated to their residences was spatially severely constrained.

Since the 1950s, Kuwait established a welfare system financed by oil revenues in which every Kuwaiti citizen is entitled to government-provided housing, healthcare, education, and other public services. Multiple government entities were created to develop and assign government housing to eligible citizens. Most recently, the Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) was established to handle the undersupply of government sponsored housing in the country.³² The PAHW housing units themselves need to comply with a suite of requirements, where the most prominent feature is that the single-family units should have a minimum lot size of 400m².

Despite institutional reforms, housing stands as a one of the major policy challenges.³³ The state owns 90 percent of the land and forbids private companies from developing or trading in ‘private residential’ land zoned for Kuwaitis. This system fomented a surge in prices, where the land value takes up 80 percent of the value of the dwelling.³⁴ Unlike other housing systems around the globe, Kuwait has no mortgage laws set in place.³⁵ And

²⁹ Non-Kuwaiti citizens are restricted to settle in privately-owned land that is outside of residential ‘Kuwaiti areas’ (e.g., in areas like Hawally, Salmiya, Farwaniya, Abra q Khaitan and Fahaheel).

³⁰ In non-Kuwaiti neighbourhoods, ‘[a] large portion of the unguided and uncontrolled housing was built without municipal sanction... and without planning or building licenses.’ This ad hoc system of block planning failed to properly consider major issues like residential densities and access to services and amenities. See: Saba Shiber, *The Kuwait Urbanisation: Documentation, Analysis, Critique* (Kuwait: Kuwait Government Press, 1964), pp. 224–5.

³¹ Law No. 74 of 1979.

³² PAHW’s main responsibility is to supervise the housing stock and provide eligible citizens with new units, bringing the average waiting period for new houses down to more acceptable levels. However, statistics from 2020 show that there are 91,794 applications on PAHW’s waitlist, with almost 44 percent of those waiting have been on the waitlist for over than 10 years. See: Alshalfan, Alrasheed and Albabtain, ‘Housing Kuwaitis’; ‘Housing Problem in Kuwait and the Way Forward’, *Marmore MENA Intelligence* (2022). Available at: <https://www.marmoremna.com/en/reports/housing-problem-in-kuwait-and-the-way-forward/> (accessed 20 March 2024).

³³ The government has been unable to deliver housing solutions on a timely manner and the restrictions on land ownership and development have led to unaffordable prices. See: Alshalfan, Alrasheed and Albabtain, ‘Housing Kuwaitis’, p. 19.

³⁴ While globally that number stands at 30 percent. See: Marmore, ‘Kuwait Housing Problem’, p. 6.

³⁵ However, the Kuwait Credit Bank (KCB, a state-owned financial body responsible for financing housing) provides interest-free loans to help Kuwaiti citizens find housing solutions. Historically, the state provided built houses to Kuwaitis. However, given the difficulties in keeping up with demand, PAHW has shifted more towards the plot-and-loan scheme in the past three decades and these loans have mostly been used to build houses on land made available by the government. Only Kuwaiti citizens are eligible for housing from PAHW or aid from Kuwait Credit Bank (KCB). More recent laws

another quirk of Kuwait's housing system is that access to government sponsored/subsidised housing is based on citizenship, gender, marital and property ownership status.³⁶

In addition to the housing question, urban policies in Kuwait have been influenced by the country's rapid urbanisation, efforts to modernise infrastructure, challenges posed by the regulatory framework, and the administrative capacity required to implement these policies. Kuwait's urban regulatory framework is dependent on multiple institutions. Foremost among these is the Supreme Council for Planning and Development (SCPD), the main body setting the vision and development plans for the country, alongside social and economic goals. Second in line is the Kuwait Municipality, mandated by law to develop national urban policy and overseeing land use and building construction regulations.³⁷

Legally, the masterplan should act as a physical blueprint for the country's growth and development plans (e.g., outlining land uses and specific policies, strategies, and projects that the government can implement to achieve its long-term vision). However, practice has shown that there are significant discrepancies between plans and on the ground implementation.³⁸ The patchy enforcement of building codes and zoning regulations has allowed for ad hoc development and further urban sprawl. The limited capacity of Kuwait Municipality to develop and implement policies due to bureaucratic inefficiencies and lack of resources is widely acknowledged. Decision making is often discretionary and reactive to political pressures, rather than solidly based on a policy framework. Another major factor is political instability – the average tenure of cabinet members in charge of planning is around 1.8 years, which represents a key challenge to bodies charged with long-term strategic development.³⁹

also allowed for other commercial banks to provide housing loans for up to 15 years. See: Alshalfan, Alrasheed and Albabtain, 'Housing Kuwaitis', p. 89.

³⁶ More specifically, eligible candidates must be married, male, Kuwaiti citizens that do not own property in the country. Thus, even though non-citizens make up the majority of the population, they are concentrated in a small proportion of the metropolitan area – 78 percent of which is allocated to Kuwaiti residential areas. See: Alshalfan, Alrasheed and Albabtain, 'Housing Kuwaitis', p. 6.

³⁷ This is mainly accomplished through the allocation of land, enforcing of building codes, and the issuing of building permits and licensing practitioners (architectural/engineering practices). The masterplan acts as the main guide to the municipality when it comes to physical planning strategies for the country. The Municipal Council plays an important institutional role in scrutinising and approving the Municipality's policies shaping urban form. This scrutinising and approval role is based on studies carried out by various departments of the Municipality, which must also be passed on and approved by the Minister of State for Municipal Affairs. However, when no agreement is reached, the Council of Ministers have final say. See: Alshalfan, Alrasheed and Albabtain, 'Housing Kuwaitis', p. 35.

³⁸ For example, a recent report on housing explains how PAHW has developed three districts (Jaber Al-Ahmed, Sabah Al-Ahmed and South Al-Mutla'a) with no relation to the masterplan. The findings also show how PAHW designed residential housing districts with only 25 percent of the recommended density proposed by 3KMP, which was 12 units per hectare. A final example can be found in the West Abdullah al Mubarak area, which had been assigned to a different function in the masterplan but due to political pressure was transferred to PAHW to be developed as a residential district. See: Alshalfan, Alrasheed and Albabtain, 'Housing Kuwaitis', p. 53.

³⁹ This figure is calculated based on data from 1979–2006. See: Yasmeeen Al Jalal, 'Oil and Opportunity: An Overview of Kuwait's Development Planning History', *Shuwaikh Economic Office* (2021). Available at: <https://www.economicoffice.com/> (accessed 25 March 2024).

Demographic Features

The main demographic feature of Kuwait is that non-Kuwaitis form the majority of the population. As shown in Table 1, during the 2000–20 period, the total population more than doubled from 2.21 million to 4.70 million. Non-Kuwaitis outgrew Kuwaitis, increasing their share from 62.1 percent to 68.7 percent, standing at about 3.23 million in 2020 compared to 1.37 million Kuwaitis in 2000.

Table 1: Population Segments during 2000–20

	2000		2020		% Change	
	Population	% of Total	Population	% of Total	Annual	Total
Total	2.209	-	4.702	-	3.9	112.9
Kuwaiti	0.849	38.4	1.471	31.3	2.8	73.4
Non-Kuwaiti	1.371	62.1	3.231	68.7	4.4	135.7
Domestic labour	0.263	19.2*	0.739	22.9*	5.3	180.8
Net non-Kuwaiti, excluding domestic labour	1.108	50.1	2.492	53.0	4.1	125

For reference: * Calculated as a percentage of total non-Kuwaitis. Source: Statistical Reports. PACI. Available at: <http://stat.paci.gov.kw/arabicreports/> (accessed 19 November 2023).

Another feature of Kuwaiti society is the prevalence of domestic labour performed by migrants (mostly from India and the Philippines) living and working in Kuwaiti households. In 2020, there were around 739,000, representing a ratio of one domestic worker for every two Kuwaitis.

Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis are characteristically distinct communities. The distribution of non-Kuwaitis is concentrated in the working age range of 26–55 years, with males substantially outnumbering females, whereas Kuwaitis are younger and balanced in terms of gender, with more than half the population under the age of 24.⁴⁰ Non-Kuwaitis are not a monolithic bloc; of the approximately 2.9 million non-Kuwaitis in 2021, about 55.7 percent were Asians (predominantly coming from India, Bangladesh, and the Philippines) and 36.7 percent were non-GCC Arabs (mostly Egyptians and Syrians).⁴¹ In addition to the ethnic and cultural diversity associated with source countries, different groups within the non-Kuwaiti population tend to cluster in certain residential and employment sectors, which translates into differences in housing and economic conditions. Moreover, even migrants of the same ethnicity or country of origin can vary significantly in their socioeconomic status.

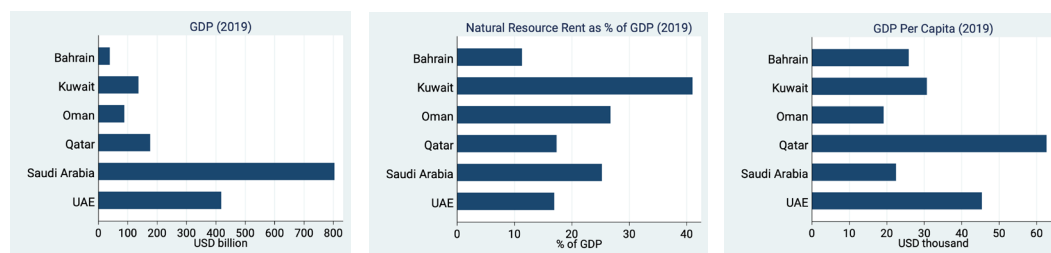
⁴⁰ Source: PACI (June 2022).

⁴¹ Source: 2021 Census and PACI (June 2022).

Economic Features

Among its GCC peers, Kuwait ranks fourth in GDP (USD136.2 billion) and third in GDP per capita (USD30,666) in 2019 (see Figure 2).⁴²

Figure 2: GDP in Current USD (A), Natural Resource Rent as % of GDP (B), and GDP per Capita in Current USD (C) in GCC Countries in 2019



Source: World Bank.

However, oil rents account for 41% of GDP – the highest in the GCC. Further illustrating this oil-dependence is the fact that about nine out of every ten dollars in export and fiscal revenues in 2019 are sourced from oil.⁴³ The size of the labour force (excluding domestic workers) in 2019 was 2.13 million, of which 81.5% were non-Kuwaitis.⁴⁴ The public sector employs most of the Kuwaiti workforce (81.5%), whereas 96% of private sector employment is taken up by non-Kuwaiti workers. The concentration of Kuwaitis in the public sector places significant fiscal pressure on the state, as salaries account for 56.6% of public expenditures. Kuwaitis favour government jobs because they offer higher wages, more generous benefits, better employment security, shorter work hours, and less demanding tasks compared to private sector jobs.

In summary, Kuwait's economy is plagued by four structural imbalances:

1. Excessive dependence on oil as a source of economic activity, national income, and fiscal revenue.
2. Public sector salaries and subsidies eating up 75 percent of the government budget.
3. A stratified and lopsided labour market where Kuwaitis are concentrated in government jobs, and the private sector is almost entirely dominated by non-Kuwaitis.
4. A demographic imbalance whereby non-Kuwaitis form over a two-thirds majority, raising issues related to resource allocation, urban governance, social strife, and economic and spatial inequalities.

There is widespread agreement among national policymakers, the business community, academia, and civil society on the need for economic reform to address these imbalances. Every long- and short-term development plan presented by the government sets forth goals for achieving that, yet little has materialised on the ground.

⁴² GDP data from 2019 are presented instead of 2020–1 to avoid unusual effects from the COVID-19 pandemic. Data from 2022 are not yet available for all countries at the time of writing.

⁴³ Exports data from the Annual Statistical Abstract 2019–10 published by the Central Statistical Bureau. Fiscal revenue data from the 2018–9 Closing Accounts published by the Ministry of Finance.

⁴⁴ Labor Market Information System. Central Statistical Bureau.

Spatial Segregation

Significance

The demographic imbalance between Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis has been at the forefront of political and policy debates as well as public discourse. In 2020, the Prime Minister at the time identified it as one of Kuwait's main challenges, proclaiming that the country ought to reverse the imbalance so that Kuwaitis would instead represent a 70 percent majority.⁴⁵ This statement came amid an increasingly heightened negative, and often hostile, rhetoric towards non-Kuwaitis by public figures such as parliament members and state officials, in the media, and on social media.⁴⁶

This rhetoric coincided with worsening economic and fiscal conditions in the country, deteriorating infrastructure and public services, an increase in perceived corruption across government institutions, intensified resentment towards the wealthy merchant class (who employ many of the non-Kuwaiti population), and the global wave of nationalism in the late 2010s. As such, it is reasonable to posit that the negative rhetoric towards foreigners may be driven by economic grievances related to concerns about resource allocation, rent-seeking by non-Kuwaitis, and overcrowding in the use of space, infrastructure, and social and municipal services. Equally plausible is that it is also rooted in nationalism and xenophobia. What makes Kuwait an interesting case-study is the fact that the group voicing these grievances is the minority that holds all the political and economic power, since non-Kuwaitis are barred from participating in the political process. Therefore, the native minority can potentially exercise its power to exploit, exclude, extract rent from, and discriminate against the migrant majority.

One way in which this power differential manifests itself is through residential segregation, which has been linked empirically in other contexts to various negative socioeconomic outcomes, such as the formation of ghettos and ethnic enclaves, adverse neighbourhood peer effects, spatial mismatch between places of residence and employment (and related externalities such as congestion and air pollution), unequal access to public goods, and decline in social capital due to strife and resentment between social groups.⁴⁷ In the following sections, we aim to quantify recent trends in residential segregation as well as explore its potential determinants. As explained previously, while we acknowledge that the non-Kuwaiti population exhibits considerable demographic, socioeconomic and housing heterogeneity, based on data availability, we limit the analysis to segregation between Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis in general. We also exclude domestic workers from

⁴⁵ 'Kuwait Faces "Big Challenge" to Address Population Discrepancy – PM', *Kuwait News Agency* (2020). Available at: <https://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=2898050> (accessed 24 February 2023).

⁴⁶ 'Na'am Li Farth Rusoom Ala Tahweelat Al-Wafideen', *Alqabas Newspaper* (2019). Available at: <https://www.alqabas.com/article/681032> (accessed 25 March 2024); 'Safa'a Al-Hashim Taqtarih Tarheel Al-Wafid wa Ustratih Inda Irtikab Adad 3 Mukhalafat Mururiya', *Aljarida Newspaper* (2019). Available at: <https://www.aljarida.com/articles/1570438082602807700> (accessed 25 March 2024).

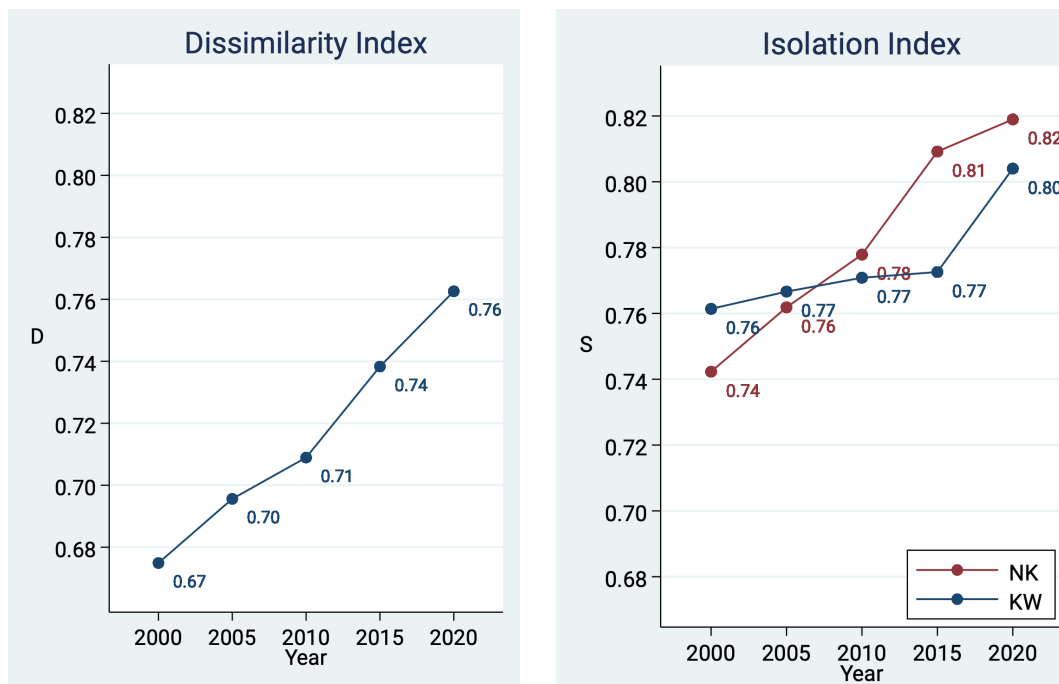
⁴⁷ Leah Platt Boustan, 'Racial Residential Segregation in American Cities', in Nancy Brooks, Kieran Donaghy and Gerrit-Jan Knaap (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Economics and Planning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 318–39.

the analysis given their unique living and working conditions in Kuwaitis' homes, making them characteristically different from the rest of the non-Kuwaiti population such that including them would misleadingly bias the analysis results towards less segregation.

Exploring Segregation

In line with the established literature on the subject, we calculate five indices of spatial segregation that capture the multi-dimensional nature of the phenomenon.⁴⁸ We start with the dissimilarity index, which measures the extent to which two groups are unevenly distributed across space with respect to their place of residence.⁴⁹ We also calculate the isolation index, which is concerned with how segregation is experienced by members of a particular group through their exposure to other members of the same group.⁵⁰ Figure 3 shows these indices calculated at five-year intervals between the years 2000 and 2020 using the district as the spatial unit of analysis.

Figure 3: Dissimilarity (A) and Isolation (B) Indices 2000–2020 (Spatial Unit: District)



⁴⁸ Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, 'The Dimensions of Residential Segregation', *Social Forces* 67/2 (1988), pp. 281–315.

⁴⁹ It ranges from zero to one and is interpreted as the proportion of either group that must relocate in order for them to be evenly distributed spatially (with a value of one indicating complete segregation and zero indicating perfect evenness).

⁵⁰ It also ranges from zero to one and is interpreted as the probability that a random person resides in an area with another member of the same group or, equivalently, the proportion of a group in the area occupied by the average member of that group (a value of one indicates complete isolation while zero indicates maximum exposure to the other group).

The upward trend of segregation is clear from these plots. The dissimilarity index increased from 0.67 to 0.76, which means that, in 2020, 76 percent of non-Kuwaitis would have to relocate across districts to achieve an even spatial distribution throughout urban Kuwait. Congruously, the isolation of non-Kuwaitis rose from 0.74 to 0.82 for the same period, meaning that the average non-Kuwaiti in 2020 resides in a district where 82 percent of residents are also non-Kuwaiti. The isolation index for Kuwaitis is also high but steady around 0.77 before a notable increase to 0.80 in 2020.⁵¹ The large segregation values reported in the two figures would characterise Kuwait as being highly segregated and having ghettos according to established criteria in the literature.⁵²

Calculating these indices using blocks instead of districts as the spatial units of analysis reveals the same high and increasing levels of segregation.⁵³ In addition to resembling neighbourhoods more accurately and being less affected by vacant land, the larger sample size and spatial variation of blocks unlocks three additional measures of segregation that incorporate location and occupied area. The first is the Delta index, which measures the extent to which a group is concentrated spatially in a small portion of the urban area.⁵⁴ Both groups were found to experience high but stable levels of concentration, with non-Kuwaitis (0.77–0.79) being slightly more concentrated than Kuwaitis (0.74–0.75). The second measure is the Absolute Centralisation index (ACE) measures the spatial distribution of a group relative to the CBD in Kuwait City.⁵⁵ Non-Kuwaitis were found to reside closer to the CBD, albeit with moderate ACE index values in the 0.32–0.35 range. Finally, the Spatial Proximity (SP) index measures the extent to which members of a group reside in blocks that are clustered spatially, with high clustering implying the formation of group-specific enclaves.⁵⁶ The calculated index value indicates a moderate and slightly increasing level of clustering among members of the same group.

Spatial Variation of Segregation

Another advantage of using the block is that it allows disaggregating the indices spatially at the governorate level – as shown in Figures 4 and 5. Figure 4A and 4B show clear spatial variation in in dissimilarity and isolation for non-Kuwaitis. They are constant or increasing in all governorates, but significantly higher in Farwaniya, Hawally, and Ahmadi, while Mubarak is only mildly segregated. Figure 4C shows that Kuwaitis experience extremely high isolation in all governorates. Most notably, while non-Kuwaitis experience the lowest

⁵¹ This spike may have been the result of a decline in the non-Kuwaiti population during the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁵² David M. Cutler, Edward L. Glaeser and Jacob L. Vigdor, 'The Rise and Decline of the American Ghetto', *Journal of Political Economy* 107/3 (1999), pp. 455–506.

⁵³ Although block data are only available for 2010, 2015, and 2020.

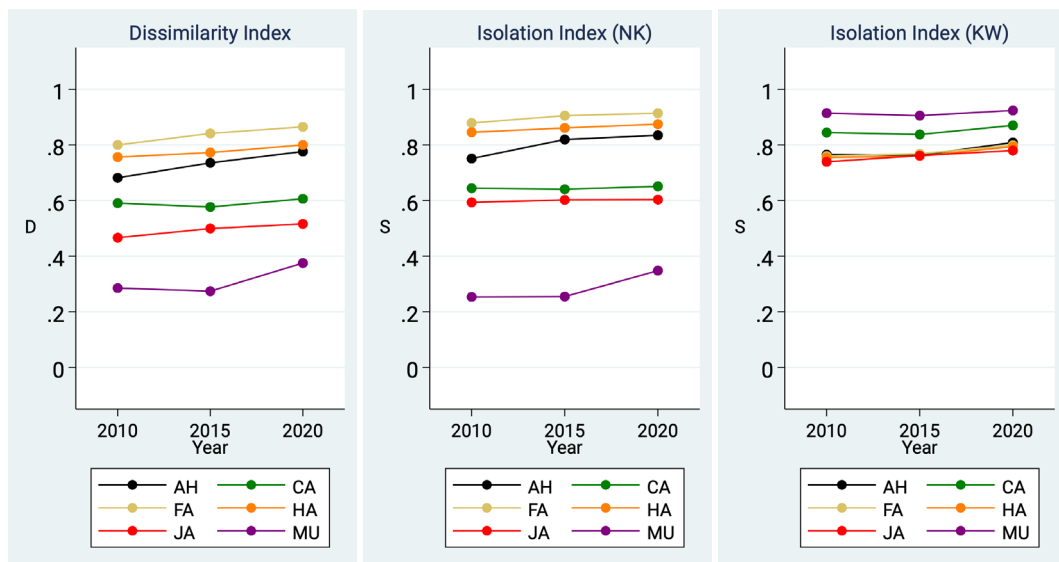
⁵⁴ It varies from zero to one, indicating the share of a group's members that must relocate across blocks in order to achieve uniform density of that group.

⁵⁵ It varies between -1 and 1, where zero indicates uniform distribution throughout the urban area and positive (negative) values indicate a tendency to reside closer to (farther from) the CBD.

⁵⁶ A value of one indicates the two groups are equally clustered, whereas greater (smaller) than one means people reside disproportionately closer to members of the same (other) group.

isolation in Mubarak governorate, Kuwaitis experience it the highest there. This contrast is not surprising, given the fact that Mubarak has an extremely low share of non-Kuwaitis (6.8% excluding domestic workers). Non-Kuwaitis in this governorate seldom encounter one another in the same block, whereas the average Kuwaiti has a high probability of encountering other Kuwaitis. The comparison between the aggregate and disaggregate indices highlight an important finding: segregation is rising overtime in the country as a whole but is stable across governorates in terms of level and rank.

Figure 4: Dissimilarity (A) and Isolation Indices for Non-Kuwaitis (B) and Kuwaitis (C) in 2010–2020 (Spatial Unit: Block)



This spatial variation extends to the other segregation indices, as shown in Figure 5 for concentration and clustering.⁵⁷ The delta index in Figures 5A and 5B shows that both non-Kuwaitis and Kuwaitis are concentrated in the areas that they occupy more than their respective average densities in all governorates. Moreover, both groups are similar in terms of where they are most (Ahmadi and Jahra) and least (Mubarak) concentrated. The SP index in Figure 5C reveals spatial variation that was otherwise obscured by the aggregate index calculated in the previous section, showing Farwaniya, Hawally and Ahmadi governorates having moderate levels of spatial clustering among members of the same group (SP>1), whereas residents of the Capital, Jahra, and Mubarak governorates tend to mix with the other group disproportionately.

⁵⁷ The centralisation index is omitted since disaggregating it by governorate is uninformative due to the largely monocentric nature of Kuwait.

Figure 5: Concentration Indices for Non-Kuwaitis (A), Kuwaitis (B) and Clustering Index (C) in 2010–2020 (Spatial Unit: Block)

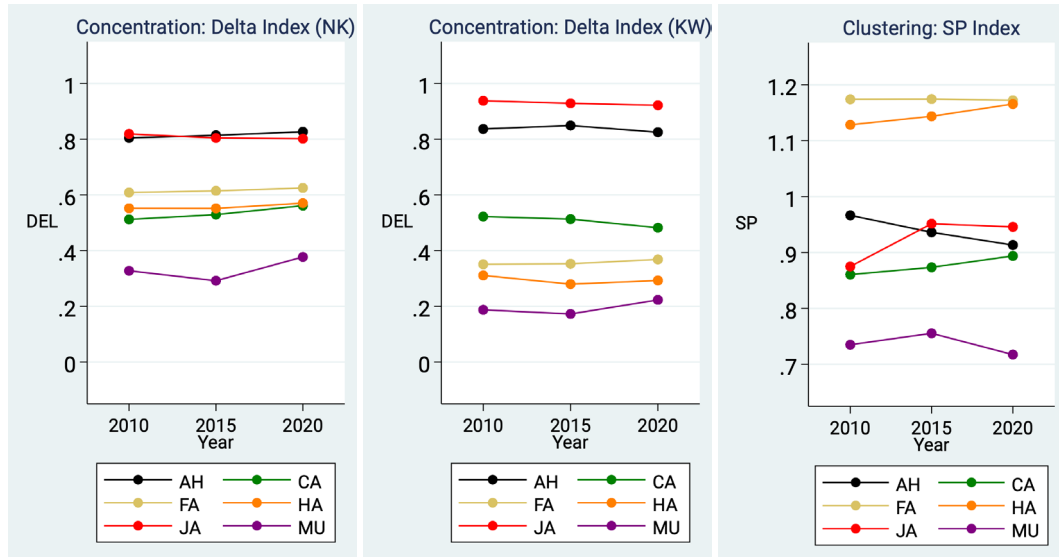
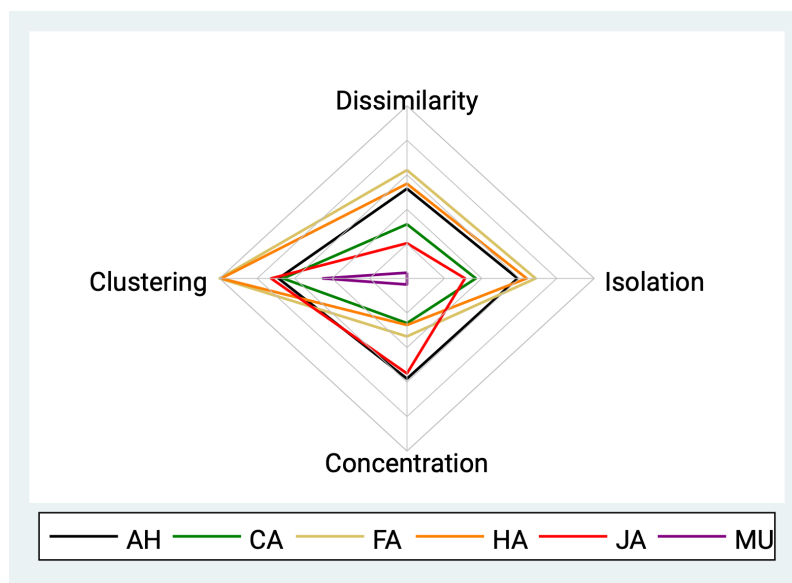


Figure 6 summarises the disaggregated segregation indices by ranking the governorates along each index in the year 2020. By looking at all the disaggregate indices together, it becomes clear that Farwaniya, Hawally, and Ahmadi consistently rank highest along various dimensions of segregation, whereas Mubarak is the least segregated. The only notable exception is Jahra, tied with Ahmadi, where people are most concentrated relative to the size of the area they occupy.

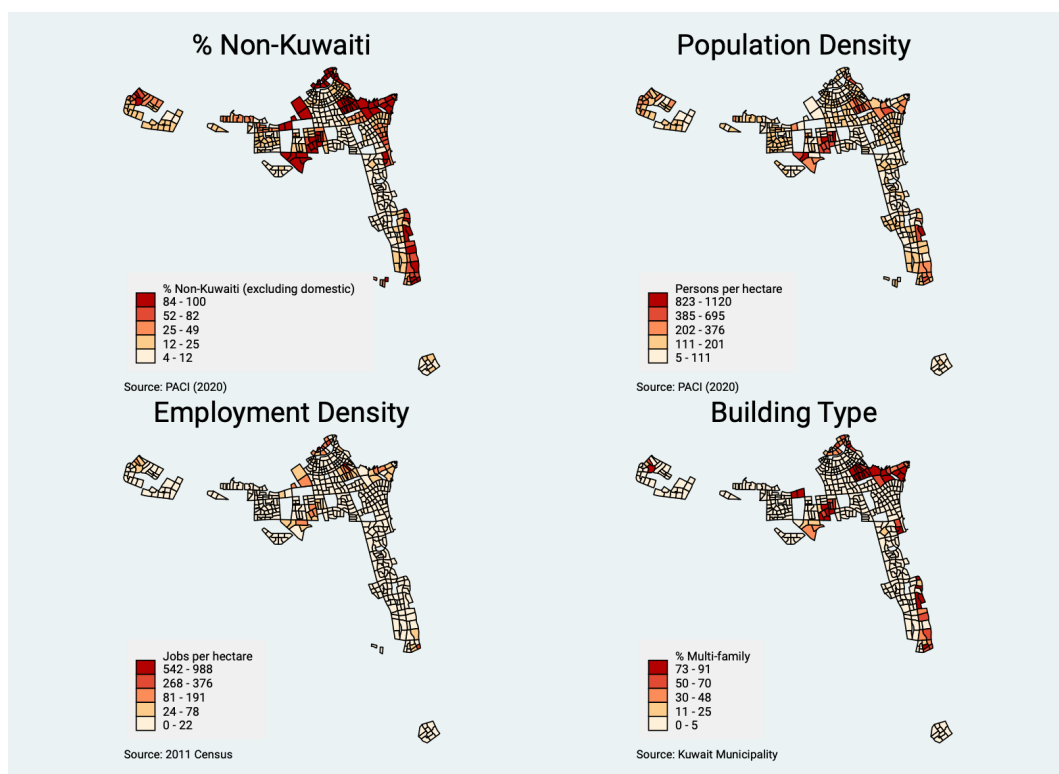
Figure 6: Segregation Indices by Governorate⁵⁸



⁵⁸ Due to differing scales between the indices, this figure is meant to illustrate the ranking of each governorate along the segregation indices and not their absolute values.

These results beg the question of what may explain the spatial variation in segregation. The maps in Figure 7 show that segregation correlates strongly with variables that are directly related to the spatial concentration of non-Kuwaitis. First, the highly segregated governorates of Farwaniya, Hawally, and Ahmadi happen to be where the blocks with the highest shares of non-Kuwaitis are located. This spatial concentration of non-Kuwaitis is also associated with high population, employment, and residential multi-family land use densities.

Figure 7: Segregation Correlates⁵⁹



Causes of Segregation in Kuwait: Behavioural or by Design?

Government studies and previous research have already pointed to potential causes of the observed segregation.⁶⁰ With ownership rights reserved to Kuwaitis and rental prohibited in their areas, and rents of single-family housing in privately-developed areas being unaffordable, non-Kuwaitis were effectively steered towards multi-family housing located in mixed-use districts—shown in our analysis to have disproportionately high concentrations of non-Kuwaitis even to the present time. The result is what may be called centralised segregation, whereby the politically and economically dominant group (Kuwaitis)

⁵⁹ Employment density data at the block level are only available from the 2011 Census.

⁶⁰ For example, a study prepared for the 2KMP distinguishes residential areas for Kuwaitis – almost entirely low-density single-family housing built on state-owned land – from other residential areas developed into both single- and multi-family housing on privately-owned land. See: Colin Buchanan and Partners, *Housing In Kuwait: Studies for a National Physical Plan for the State of Kuwait and Master Plan for the Urban Areas* (Kuwait: Buchanan, 1969).

implements exclusionary housing and land use policies via top-down central planning or collective action through their elected legislative bodies.⁶¹ Indeed, prior studies and surveys point to housing preferences and inter-group social attitudes as catalysts for segregation, where Kuwaitis express strong sentiments against opening their neighbourhoods to non-Kuwaitis or multi-family housing.⁶² Translating these preferences into collective action would produce centralised segregation.

Alternatively, Kuwaitis may also autonomously flee demographically mixed areas to form their own exclusive neighbourhoods. Such decentralised segregation emerges as a result of uncoordinated actions by the economically dominant group.⁶³ Finally, while past surveys did not reveal a particular aversion by non-Kuwaitis to co-locating with Kuwaitis, self-segregation is plausible if driven by homophily, network benefits, common preferences for local amenities, or avoidance of hostility from Kuwaitis.⁶⁴

Testing these causes empirically is econometrically challenging. For centralised segregation, it is unclear in which direction the causality flows. Urban and housing policies might have generated the segregation; or policymakers might have enacted these policies in response to expected segregation. Decentralised and self-segregation, on the other hand, is driven by preferences and attitudes that are difficult to measure or control for statistically. In addition, the unavailability of longitudinal household-level data severely limits the set of econometric techniques needed to establish causal links empirically.⁶⁵ Whichever direction these forces may be flowing, the question of whether governance arrangements may be enabling or countering them remains pertinent. A question to which we turn to in the next section.

Urban Governance

Governance and Public Policy Decisions

As we have seen, it is possible that the current spatial configuration of Kuwait stems from both the behaviours of residents and past planning and urban policy decisions. But is that the whole story? Given the widespread dissemination of several global agendas – including

⁶¹ Cutler, Glaeser and Vigdor, 'The Rise and Decline of the American Ghetto'.

⁶² Farah Al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed*; Al-Moosa, 'Kuwait: Changing Environment in a Geographical Perspective'.

⁶³ Cutler, Glaeser and Vigdor, 'The Rise and Decline of the American Ghetto'.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Nevertheless, regression estimates of key urban form variables indicate that the share of non-Kuwaitis in a residential block is associated negatively with residential single-family land use and positively with agricultural and industrial land uses, but commercial and leisure land uses are not found to be statistically significant predictors of non-Kuwaitis' concentration. In the same vein, the entropy index of land use diversity is found to be positively associated with the share of non-Kuwaitis. Furthermore, non-Kuwaitis tend to be concentrated in areas with larger shares of small residential dwellings and taller buildings, while their share is negatively associated with the number of single-family houses. These findings suggest that land use and housing policies and regulations may explain the observed spatial distribution of Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis. If these associations can be shown to be causal, it would be consistent with the centralised segregation hypothesis while also not ruling out other potential causes.

many focused on the urban scale – and the growing consensus around the building blocks of ‘sustainable urbanisation’, what else may be preventing decision-makers from finding alternative models of development? There are emerging signs that Kuwaiti authorities, and society at large, are aware of the problems and, for example, recognise the need to move away from such a high dependence on oil income. Our working hypothesis is that the policy inertia experienced by Kuwait is linked to the way governance works in the country.

‘Urban governance’ can be succinctly defined as the process by which public policy decisions are made and implemented in and for cities.⁶⁶ This process is not irrelevant. We know that the urban governance system of a particular city makes certain kinds of political interests and public policy decisions easier to adopt than others.⁶⁷ One of the key analytical advantages of the concept of governance is that, unlike traditional public administration approaches, it is agnostic with regards to the presumed roles of the various actors involved.⁶⁸ This leads us to the first question we will tackle in this section, namely: who is actually involved in the strategic spatial planning of Kuwait? Answering this question alone, however, will not tell us much about the relative ability of each one of these actors to influence strategic decisions. To delve into this second part, we must somehow analyse the patterns arising from the way the actors are interconnected. That is, the social structures underpinning the governance of spatial planning in Kuwait.

To identify the key governance actors and the ways they are interconnected, we adopted an approach based on face-to-face, structured interviews, using a script of open-ended questions (see the Appendix). In their answers, respondents referred to individuals and organisations involved in or impacting their work as it relates to strategic spatial planning in Kuwait. We are interested in various types of connections, relationships, and exchanges – not just formal ones. To capture these connections, we have conducted 24 interviews with high level representatives between October 2021 and March 2022.⁶⁹ The interview notes and recordings were used to produce the network data.⁷⁰ We employed social network analysis (SNA) methods to calculate various centrality scores and gauge the key structural features of Kuwait’s spatial planning governance network.⁷¹

⁶⁶ “A Users” Guide to Measuring Local Governance’, *UNDP* (2009). Available at: <https://www.undp.org/publications/users-guide-measuring-local-governance-0> (accessed 25 March 2024).

⁶⁷ Jon Pierre, *The Politics of Urban Governance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011).

⁶⁸ Nuno F. da Cruz et al., ‘Networked Urban Governance: A Socio-Structural Analysis of Transport Strategies in London and New York’, *Urban Affairs Review* (2022). Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/10780874221117463> (accessed 25 March 2024).

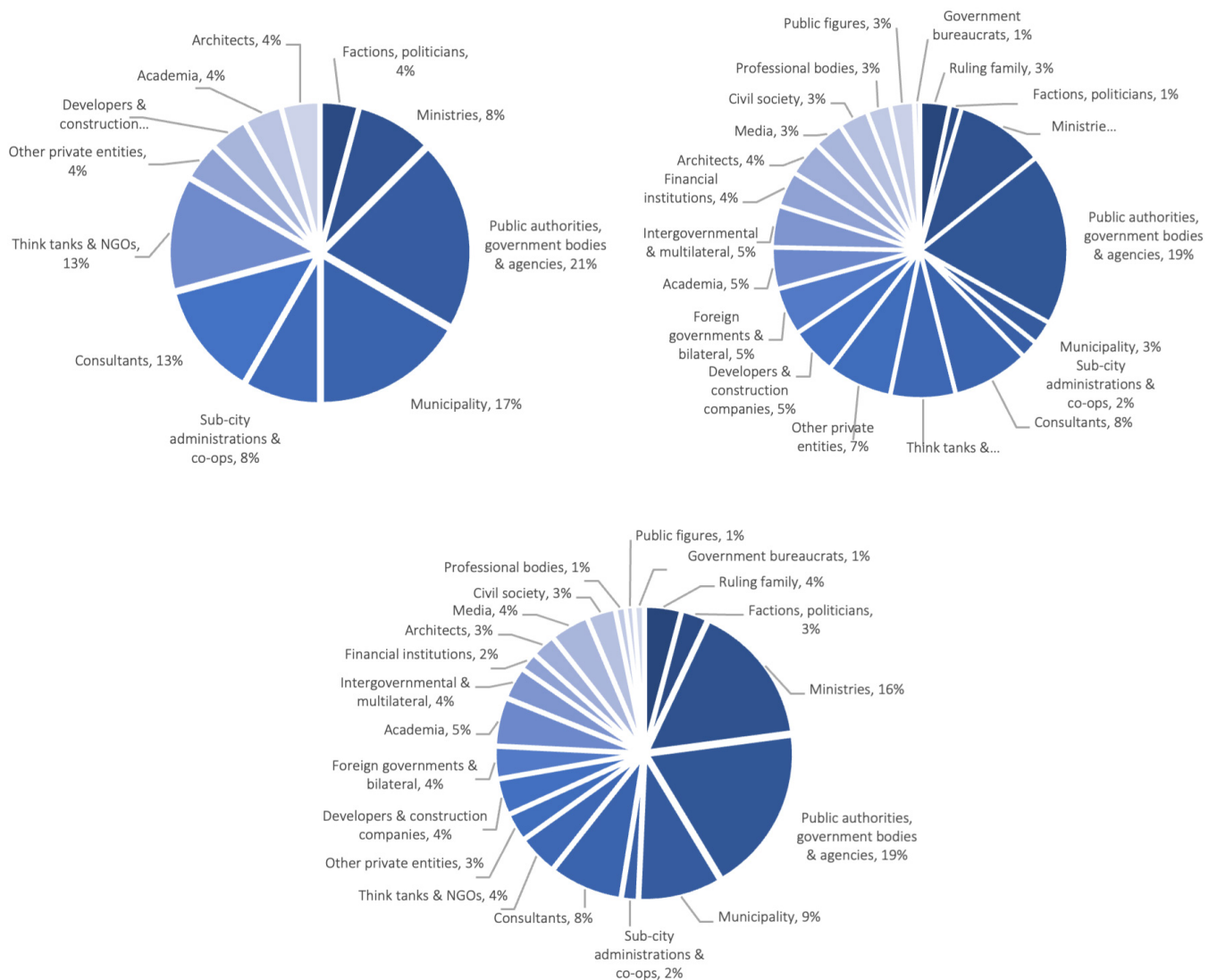
⁶⁹ Anonymity was granted to all interviewees (however, we use the real names of their parent organisations).

⁷⁰ The various network nodes (i.e., actors) and the way they were interconnected was extracted from the participants’ answers to the questions of the interview script (e.g., actor 1 mentioned actor 3 and actor 7 in their answer to question 3, and so on). The answers to all questions were aggregated to produce the network and conduct the analysis, with the exception of questions ‘Q13’ and ‘Q16’ (these questions were not intended to produce network data). Regarding the ‘strength’ of the ties between actors, we assume that if an actor is cited by an interviewee for several of the questions, then the relationship is stronger than if it is only mentioned once.

⁷¹ For the mathematical formulae of these and other parameters used in this paper see: Christina Prell, *Social Network Analysis: History, Theory and Methodology* (London: Sage, 2012).

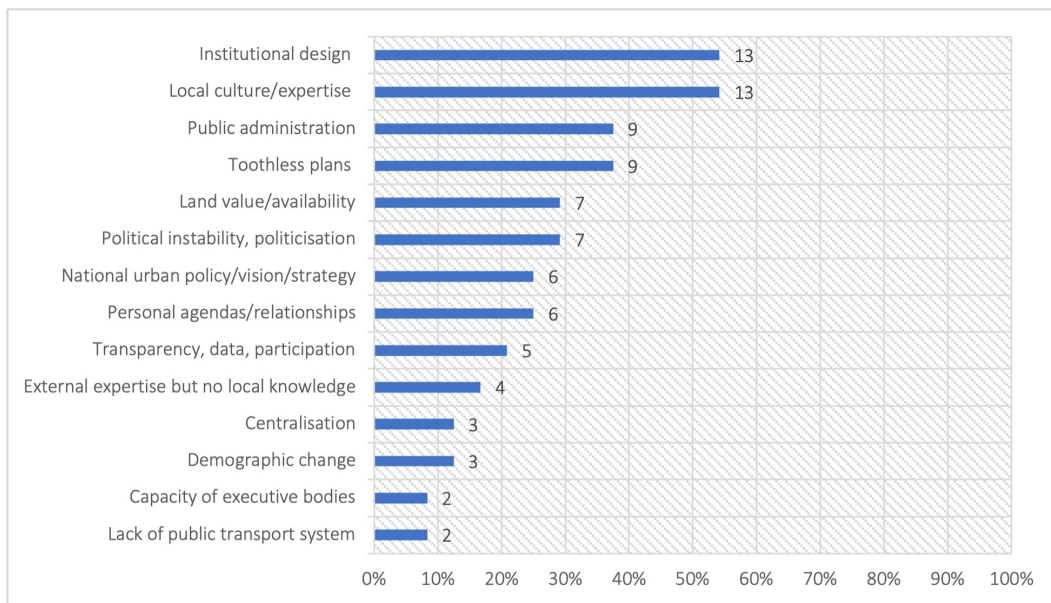
According to our interview data, there is a total of 153 different actors that are in some way relevant to the governance of spatial planning in Kuwait. Relative to the full set of actors (see Figure 8B), municipality actors seem to be overrepresented in the set of interviewees (see Figure 8A). However, the mix of interviewed actors are much more aligned and representative of full governance network if we instead consider the number of times each of the 153 actors were mentioned during the interviews (see Figure 8C).

Figure 8: Prevalence of Actors From Different Stakeholder Groups in (A) Set of Interviewees, (B) Complete Governance Network, and (C) How Often Actors Were Mentioned by Different Interviewees



Beyond the network data, the interviews allowed us to collect different types of qualitative information about the perceptions of respondents. Figure 9 shows the ranking of governance challenges identified by the various stakeholders in their responses to Q1. In their view, the top problems are related to institutional design issues⁷² and to local culture and the prevailing expertise in the sector.⁷³

Figure 9: Top Governance Challenges Identified by Interviewees



Networked Urban Governance in Kuwait

The cast of characters that form the governance network of spatial planning in Kuwait is shown in Figure 10. It immediately becomes clear that this network is dominated by urban (i.e., municipal) and national government actors – not necessarily in terms of their number (as Figure 8B had shown), but in terms of their position in the network.⁷⁴ Highly central actors have more ability to access governance resources of various types, such as information, advice and authority.⁷⁵ To probe deeper into these structural features of the governance network, Tables 2 and 3 show the most central actors according to different measures.

⁷² Namely, (1) the tensions between the SCPD and Municipality and their competitive/oppositional stance, (2) the misalignment between socioeconomic/development plans and physical plans, (3) the siloed nature of delivery agencies, (4) power struggles, and (5) overlapping and underlapping responsibilities.

⁷³ Namely, (1) engineering-led approaches that lead to solutions like satellite cities, segregation, car dependence, anti-density sentiment, disappearance of social interaction in public spaces, disregard for walkability and accessibility and how these relate to liveability, and (2) the household as the scale that shapes the city.

⁷⁴ Both the size of the nodes and their network position is determined by the number and nature of their connections to other nodes. The network visualisation is generated algorithmically by the software package Gephi. See: Mathieu Bastian, Sebastien Heymann and Mathieu Jacomy, *Gephi: An Open Source Software for Exploring and Manipulating Networks* (San Jose, CA: International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media, 2009).

⁷⁵ It should be noted, however, that although centrality may confer capacity to influence strategic decisions, it does not necessarily equate to ‘power’. For example, the Emir does not have to rely heavily on his social network to hold significant de facto power. Hard power arises from resource control and/or strong legal mandates. See: Zachary Neal, Ben Derudder and Xingjian Liu, ‘Using Urban Networks to Gain New Insight Into Old Questions: Community, Economy, Bureaucracy’, *Journal of Urban Affairs* 43/1 (2021) pp. 2–15.

Table 2: Indegree (Directed, Binary Data) and Weighted Indegree (Directed, Valued Data) Centrality for the Top 10 Nodes in Terms of Indegree Centrality

Actor	Indegree	Actor	Weighted indegree
Kuwait Municipality	18	Kuwait Municipality	62 –
SCPD	16	SCPD	40 –
Council of Ministers	16	Council of Ministers	32 –
Social media	15	Kuwait University	25 ↑
Kuwait University	13	KM Master Plan Department	22 ↑
Members of Parliament	11	Social media	21 ↓
Ministry of Public Works	10	Ministry of Public Works	20 –
KM Master Plan Department	9	Consultants	20 ↑
Consultants	9	Members of Parliament	17 ↓
Perkins + Will	8	PAHW	17 ↑
PAHW	8	Director General Kuwait Municipality	16 ↑
Prime Minister	8	Perkins + Will	15 ↓
Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al Sabah	8	Prime Minister	13 ↓
Youth organisations	8	Municipal Council	13 ↑

Looking into other centrality measures, the dominance of urban and national government entities is largely confirmed (see Table 3).⁷⁷ However, we can see that some other actors manage to garner influence by either being connected to powerful actors (e.g., consultants and Kuwait University), by serving as brokers, connecting actors that would otherwise be disconnected (e.g., consultants, Kuwait University, Kuwait Commute and Perkins + Will), or by holding key information or being in a position that confers them a certain independence to act (e.g., consultants and Kuwait University). These scores reflect what we have heard from our interviewees qualitatively.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ PageRank is based on the links made to a node from other nodes and therefore can be interpreted as an importance score. ‘Eigenvector’ centrality gauges connection to important actors, reflecting the notion that more than just highly connected, it is advantageous to be connected to high status actors. ‘Betweenness’ centrality is a proxy for control and is related to the capacity for each actor to play a brokerage role (e.g., bridging gaps between actors and facilitating coalitions). Finally, ‘closeness’ centrality is an indicator of independence, information level, or capacity to mobilise a network.

⁷⁸ We have heard, for example, that it was Perkins + Will, a foreign firm, that connected several public sector entities as part of their work on the 4KMP that would otherwise not speak to each other (e.g., holding workshops and training sessions). Central government entities are either very technical and siloed or purely political.

Table 3: Top 10 Nodes in Terms of Page Rank (Directed, Binary Data), Eigenvector (Undirected, Valued Data), Betweenness (Directed, Binary Data) and Closeness (Undirected, Binary Data) Centralities

Actor	PR	Actor	EC	Actor	BC	Actor	CC
Kuwait Municipality	0.013	Consultants	1.000	SCPD	769	Consultants	0.577
Council of Ministers	0.012	SCPD	0.952	Consultants	617	SCPD	0.550
SCPD	0.012	Members of Parliament	0.814	Kuwait University	389	Members of Parliament	0.544
Social media	0.011	Kuwait University	0.808	KM Master Plan Department	358	Kuwait University	0.533
Kuwait University	0.010	KM Master Plan Department	0.789	Kuwait Commute	321	Kuwait Municipality	0.519
Members of Parliament	0.009	Kuwait Municipality	0.684	Perkins + Will	238	KM Master Plan Department	0.517
Ministry of Public Works	0.009	Municipal Council	0.667	Municipal Council	222	Perkins + Will	0.503
Ministry of Finance	0.009	Perkins + Will	0.658	Members of Parliament	220	Kuwait Commute	0.503
KM Master Plan Department	0.009	Council of Ministers	0.619	Green Building Council	168	Municipal Council	0.498
Consultants	0.009	Kuwait Commute	0.617	Public Authority for Roads and Transportation	153	Council of Ministers	0.490

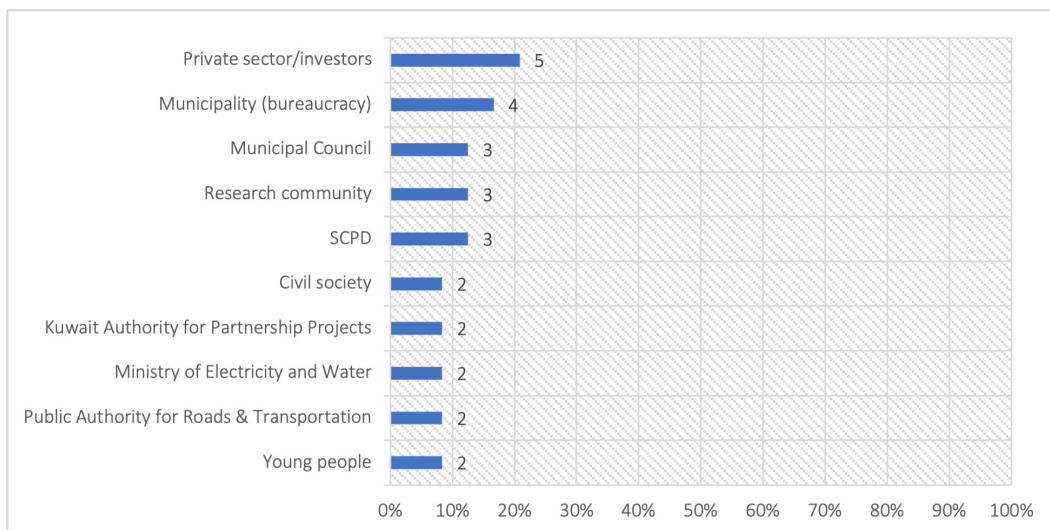
For reference: PageRank (PR), Eigenvector centrality (EC), Betweenness centrality (BC), Closeness centrality (CC).

As important as analysing the cast of character at the centre of decision-making is considering the ones that are removed from it. Beyond consultants, there is an almost complete absence of other private sector actors, notably developers or construction companies. With the exception of youth organisations, who seem to be an emerging force – notably amplified through the use of social media platforms – civil society actors struggle to get a seat at Kuwait’s decision-making table. Finally, in addition to the very limited ‘hard’ power held by sub-city entities like governors, mayors and co-ops (as discussed in the earlier section on government and administration), these actors also seem unable to harness substantial ‘soft’ power through their societal connections. Overall, spatial planning in Kuwait seems to be highly centralised, though fragmented across several government entities, to the detriment of a territorial approach to governance where decisions are taken closer to the people they affect. In the following section we explore these points further.

Power and Perceptions

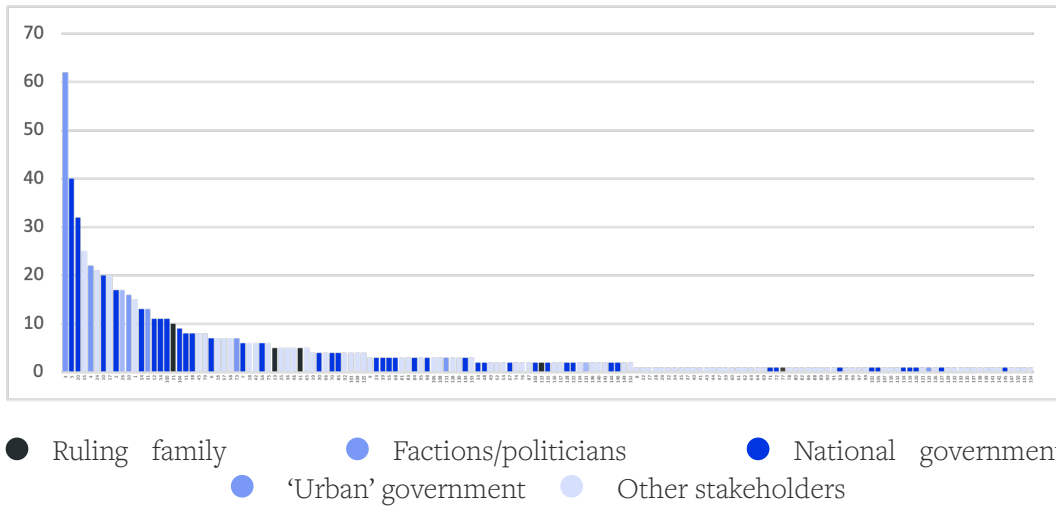
In their answers to Q13, our respondents mostly disagreed with regards to the voices that have been excluded from debates around the spatial development of the metropolis (see Figure 11). They seem to be many and of different types. Still, as already shown by our network data, the stakeholder group that earned more consensus was the private sector – whose role and potential to tackle some of the key urban challenges in Kuwait, according to some, could be better exploited. For other actors that were mentioned here but also appear to be highly central (as per the previous section), the reasons seem to be around the frustration with the highly bureaucratic procedures and occasional political override that they have to be subjected to (namely the municipality and the SCPD). This political override, though, does not come from the Municipal Council. It can be traced back to the very centre of power, the Council of Ministers.

Figure 11: Perceptions of Interviewees on Side-Lined Actors



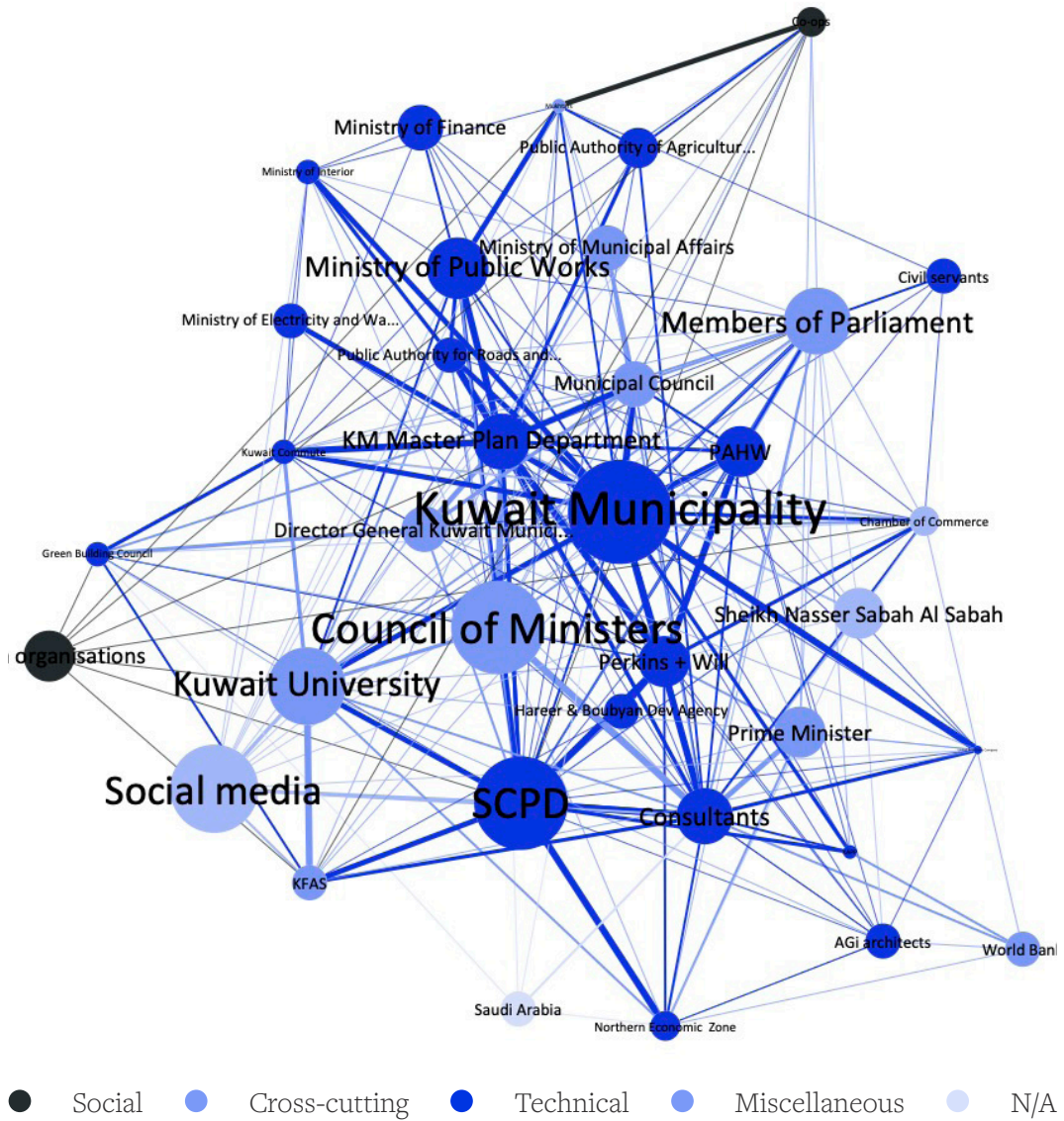
Turning back to the network data, Figure 12 shows quite distinctly how stakeholders beyond the government apparatus are pushed to the side-lines of decision-making in Kuwait. Though there are many entities with high stakes in the sector, they are only weakly connected to the actors at the core of governance. With no other means of recourse (as legal mandates are exclusive to government entities and, in the case of Kuwait, the main source of resources is also controlled by government), being highly embedded in the social networks of decision-making is one of the very few avenues left for non-government actors such as civil society or the private sector to influence policy and strategic direction. Currently, this is mostly not happening.

Figure 12: Weighted Indegree Scores for All Network Actors



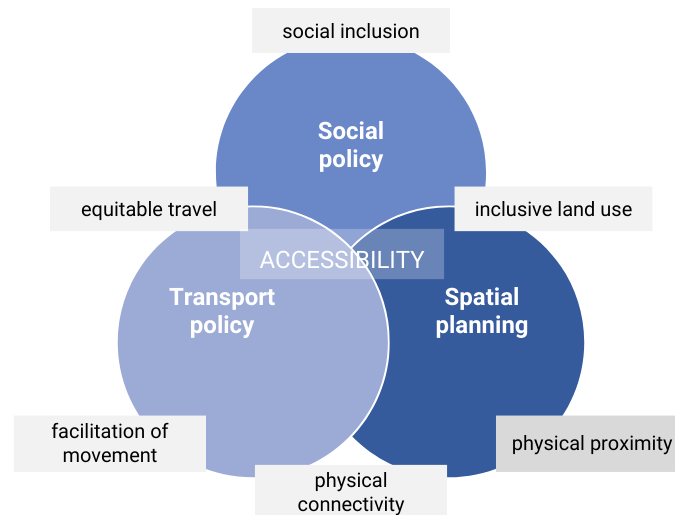
And the homogeneity of the network core goes beyond just the type of stakeholders that inhabit it. As shown in Figure 13, the expertise of the most central actors is either purely technical or, at best, cross-cutting. There are almost no actors with a primarily social focus, which would be more likely to place segregation at the top of problems that need to be tackled in Kuwait. As one of our respondents put it, the governance network lacks 'people that think about the urban in an integrated manner, not just about buildings'. This has obvious implications to what issues get tabled for policy discussions and what priorities get set. Social policy, environmental interests, and other arenas that are critical for sustainable development are likely to be overlooked.

Figure 13: The Key Expertise of Actors Central to the Governance of Spatial Planning in Kuwait



To achieve spatial integration and urban accessibility, where all residents have adequate access to services, amenities and opportunities, policy interventions need to be three-pronged: land use policy needs to come together with transport and social policy (see Figure 14).⁷⁹ Without an integrated approach, the emphasis will shift away from these urban goods, towards a different type of policy outcome. An analysis of the cast of characters of the most central actors of Kuwait's spatial governance network suggests that indeed the focus is on land use rather than on social or mobility-related objectives. It is hardly surprising that this may lead to congestion and social segregation. Promoting these domains in the hierarchy of policy concerns could be achieved by embedding the actors that champion them more strongly in the network.

Figure 14: Kuwait's Missing Policy Arenas for Urban Accessibility⁸⁰



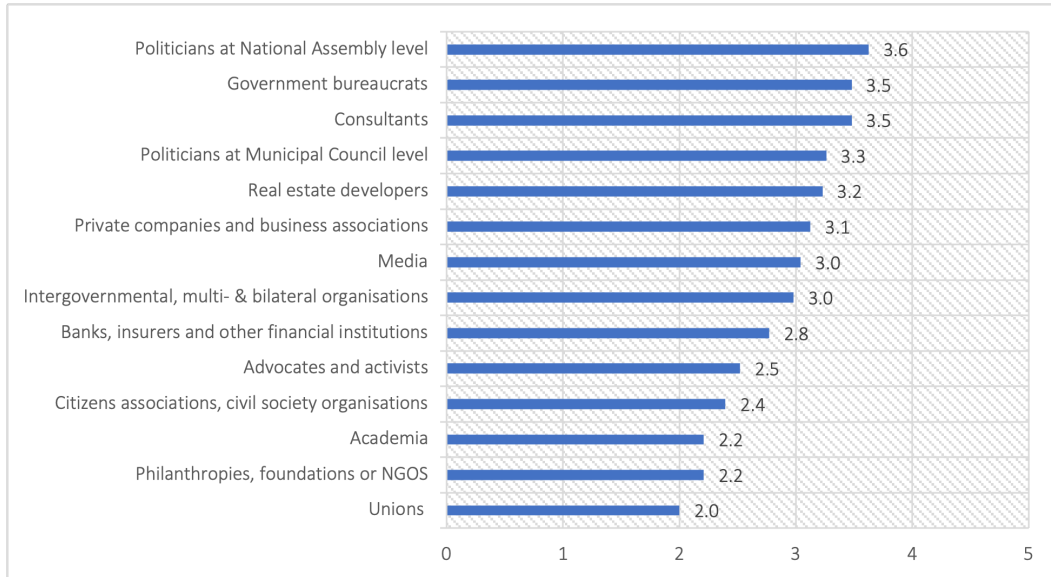
Finally, the results of the rating exercise put forward to interviewees (Q16) are shown in Figure 15. To a large extent, these perceptions are in line with our SNA findings. But there are some discrepancies. The private sector influence, for example, may have been overestimated in the respondents' ratings. Conversely, academia may have more influence than what is perceived on the ground, and the same can be said about emerging civic movements, especially through the use of social media. The power of national-level politicians finds support in our network data. However, in a country where the average tenure of cabinet members in charge of planning is around 1.8 years, and the average tenure of the cabinet as a whole is 10 months, just how fleeting this power really is represents a key question.⁸¹ As a whole, these findings provide clear pointers regarding the causes behind the apparent lack of a robust, long-term vision for urban Kuwait and the inability to reform the system.

⁷⁹ Philipp Rode, Catarina Heeckt and Nuno da Cruz, 'National Transport Policy and Cities: Key Policy Interventions to Drive Compact and Connected Urban Growth', *Coalition for Urban Transitions* (2019). Available at: https://newclimateeconomy.report/workingpapers/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2019/03/CUT2019_transport-paper_FINAL-FOR-WEB.pdf (accessed 26 March 2024).

⁸⁰ Source: adapted from *ibid.*

⁸¹ Al Jalal, 'Oil and Opportunity'.

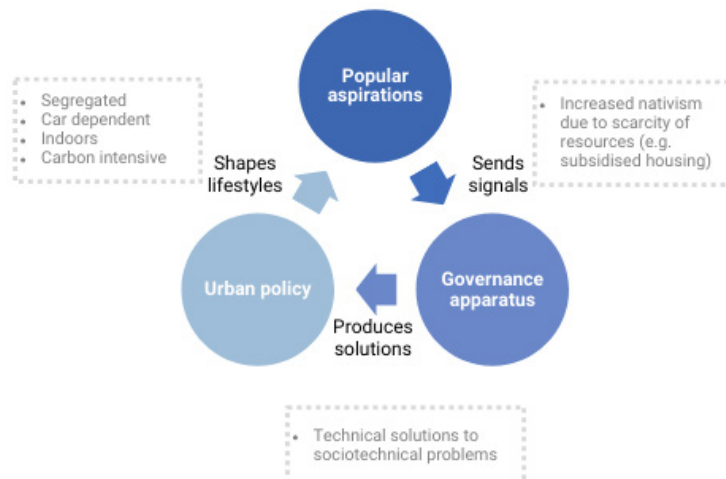
Figure 15: Perceptions of Interviewees on the Level of Influence of Different Actors



Implications for Kuwait

When it comes to the root causes of segregation in Kuwait, our findings do not allow us to isolate whether they are mostly due to technocratic, politico-ideological, or social dynamics. However, they strongly suggest that it would be unwise to dismiss any of these arenas. To change this situation, therefore, requires intervention/reform across all of them. Breaking urban Kuwait’s vicious cycle – where popular aspirations around unsustainable practices (like ‘universal’ access to 400m² housing units for Kuwaiti citizens), founded on a sense of intergenerational fairness, send strong signals to the politicians and institutions tasked with formulating policy which, once implemented, recreate societal expectations (see Figure 16) – will need a transformation of the skills, concerns and sensitivities of the actors invited to take part in strategic decision-making. The rules (like masterplans) and the institutions that implement them are of course very important. But the established formal or informal networks of advice and influence also play a role and must not be ignored if we want to enact change.

Figure 16: Urban Kuwait’s Vicious Cycle



The new empirical evidence generated as part of our research points to several pragmatic policy implications. First, as already suggested, the cast of characters involved in the strategic spatial development of Kuwait should be diversified. Not just in terms of the nature of stakeholders (public, private, civic), but also of the skills they possess and concerns they represent. Second, institutional overlaps and underlaps across the machinery of government need to be dealt with. A new culture of collaboration, not competition, among government authorities should be established to reduce the length and cost of the policy process and well as to improve its quality. Third, powers should be decentralised, either to existing entities (e.g., co-ops) or to new democratic local bodies. Decisions and services affecting how people live, move about, and socialise should be taken and delivered closer to them, by entities and representatives that have local knowledge and are accountable to residents. And, fourth, housing and land use policies need to become more inclusive and oriented towards improving the liveability, diversity, and accessibility of all neighbourhoods. More specifically, a more sustainable model of housing for Kuwaitis is long overdue, and housing supply for non-Kuwaitis needs to be increased and their housing conditions improved (like dealing with overcrowding). The benefits of these interventions would cut across the whole of Kuwaiti society – both citizens and non-citizens.

Our findings open new questions for future debates and academic research. Kuwait offers a unique setting to study the links between governance and outcomes. When confronted with complex urban challenges, many cities around the world point the finger at unresponsive nation states, claiming that they do not have the powers to deal with them effectively. This limitation does not apply to Kuwait. So why is governance reform so challenging? What are the key factors at play? Another clear avenue laid open by our investigation is linking segregation to inequalities (e.g., which is causing which?) and socioeconomic outcomes for Kuwaitis, non-Kuwaitis, and society as a whole. Finally, specifically regarding the role played by government, how far is segregation intentional or a result of an inability to cope with pressures (like demand for subsidised housing)? To pin down the causes of segregation within and between Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis would allow for more effective policy design to counter these trends – which have perverse effects at the metropolitan scale affecting residents across all social groups.

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Aerial view of Kuwait City skyline and central business district.

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